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4

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University Aims to Reduce Health Disparities

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The Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences Center for Health Disparities Research and Education held a conference April 12 to increase awareness about health care disparities.

Researchers focused on diseases that tend to affect a high number of minorities. Dr. Randall Maxey, from the Alliance for Minorities Medical Association, said African-Americans, Native Americans and Hispanics are more susceptible to high blood pres-

sure and kidney failure among others.

Maxey said the military has great potential for decreasing future health disparities, because service members work with different cultures.

"If I'm treating [a Chinese man], I need to learn about him before I can properly provide the care he deserves," Maxey said. "I need to learn about what he eats, his lifestyle and things he's susceptible to because of his ethnicity. That makes me more culturally competent and I ... increase my patient's chance of a favorable outcome."

"The military is probably one of the most diverse

employers in the world," said Dr. Richard Tanenbaum, the research center's principal investigator. "For [military] physicians to be able to take care of the ranks and their family members, it's important for them to understand different cultures and embed that in their clinical encounters."

Maxey said communication is essential for physicians and it's important for the patient to feel comfortable with his doctor. Increasing the number of minority doctors, Maxey said, will decrease health disparities because people of similar backgrounds tend to build relationships quicker and communicate better.

"People being treated for certain illnesses have been known to have better outcomes when they are treated by someone who may look like them and understand their culture," Maxey said. "If [health care providers] don't look like their patients, then it's still important that the provider is at least culturally competent enough to appropriately care for their patient."

Maxey said dieting and eating healthy foods can prevent many diseases for minorities. That and plenty of exercise "can go a long way in disease prevention," he said.

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